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**TAJIKISTAN**

## SUCCESS STORY

# Families Plan for Healthier Children

**Health education ensures that women plan for delivery of their children.**



*The newborn is going home from the hospital.  
Photo: Mercy Corps*

***To reduce child and maternal mortality in Tajikistan, USAID's Child Survival Program teaches young couples and expectant parents healthy lifestyle choice during the pregnancy and helps plan for delivery.***

Shokir and Manija got married two years ago. They live in Mehnatabad village of Zafarabad District with Shokir's elderly father. Recently they became parents of a healthy child. From the first month of pregnancy, the family participated in educational sessions on health promotion, prevention of infectious diseases, safe motherhood, delivery planning, and breastfeeding, organized by community health educators of the USAID and Mercy Corps Child Survival Program.

"Educational sessions is the best opportunity for couples to find out about birth planning and other useful information," says Shohir. Together with his wife, Shohir learned about the examinations recommended before pregnancy, the vitamins that could be taken before the pregnancy, necessary lifestyle changes during the pregnancy, how to plan delivery, and the vitamins that could be given to the baby. "We used all the recommendations during the pregnancy," says Shohir. When the delivery time came, he took his wife to the maternity hospital, where their doctor was waiting, and was with her during the delivery. "When my baby was born, I was allowed to take our baby into my hands," says Shokir, and a proud smile appears on his face. "I was so happy to have a healthy child!"

Many women in Tajikistan give birth at their homes due to the absence of transportation, telephone, or money. "The main reason for all these problems is the absence of information by families on how to plan deliveries correctly," says Manija. The USAID-supported educational sessions about maternity and child health explained to her about a number of preparations necessary for a successful birth and keeping the mother healthy after the birth. The young family started preparation for delivery well in advance, saved up money, made prenatal visits. Manija is also proud that her husband took over many of the house responsibilities, so that she could rest a lot, arranged transportation to hospital, and supported her during delivery. "He was standing right next to me holding my hand, and it didn't feel so painful because I had his support", she says.

The head doctor of Zafarabad Maternity House says about the cooperation with the USAID-funded program: "We are solving the priority problem of the village." The education sessions are delivered by volunteer community health educators consisting of medical staff, religious leaders, teachers and pensioners who are trained by the program. The program also helps the villages form a fund for emergency transportation of the seriously ill and expecting mothers to the hospital. This is a significant contribution for maintaining good maternal and child health.